

ONE LIFE

Dorset Humanists Magazine

30th Anniversary Year 1996-2026

August 2026



Photo by Aaron

Congratulations!

Sandra and Simon tie the knot

Warmest good wishes to Sandra Lucie-Smith and Simon Whipple on their marriage on Friday 31st July at Salisbury Registry Office. They will be known as Mr and Mrs Lucie-Whipple. On Saturday 1st August, in the beautiful garden at Sandra's home in Ringwood, there was a celebration for sixty people including many friends from Dorset Humanists. In due course they will live together in Simon's house in Woodgreen near Fordingbridge.

Sandra is a member of Dorset Humanists committee and Simon was formerly a member of our committee.

Chairman's downfall

David demonstrates theory of gravity

On our fantastic Tyneham Ranges walk on Sunday 26th July, attended by thirteen of our members, David Warden managed to take a tumble as he attempted multitasking: talking, walking, and taking a scenic photograph at the same time. His foot plunged into a rabbit hole and down he went. First aider Aaron doubled up as action photographer to capture the scene moments after it happened. Fortunately, the only injury was a grazed knee which was later attended to by Aaron.

More photos: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/qrq6Ph6rp1YPYy9A>



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Lyn steps down

Lyn Glass has stepped down from the Dorset Humanists Committee after many years of dedicated service. She served as Vice Chair since 2013, having joined Dorset Humanists several years earlier. For many years, Lyn took the lead in finding speakers for our Saturday meetings at Moordown Community Centre, persuading numerous excellent and sometimes famous speakers to visit us. Comedian Robin Ince was a particular favourite. She also organised and hosted numerous social events, including Darwin Day at the Bournemouth International

Centre, helping to foster the friendly community spirit for which Dorset Humanists is known. Dorset Humanists Committee would like to thank Lyn for her many years of commitment and service, and we wish her all the very best for the future.

Garden Party raises £395 for Humanist Schools in Uganda

Thirty members of Dorset Humanists and guests enjoyed a sweltering summer garden party at David and John’s home, with freshly made scones, clotted cream and strawberries, raising a fantastic £395 for our Humanist Schools in Uganda appeal. Delicious home made cakes were provided by Helen Newman and Roger Mann.

Image on the right: Rehan keeping cool under a colourful umbrella. Photo by Aaron (sunglasses added for effect!)



Dates for your diary

Thursday 6 th August 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the pub. Informal pub social hosted by Steve and Roger.
Friday 21 st August 7.30pm	Westcliff Hotel	Hotel bar social. No set agenda. Come along for a friendly social. Hosted by Sandra.
Sunday 30 th August 10.15	Walk	Hengistbury Head and Mudeford Foraging Walk – set off from Hiker’s Café. 4 miles. Easy walk.
Thursday 3 rd September 7.30pm	Moon in the Square	Humanists in the pub. Informal pub social hosted by Dean.
Saturday 12 th September	Moordown Community Ctr	One Life Café: <i>A Highly Abridged History of Sex</i> with Dr George Locke.

Please check all events nearer the time on Meetup in case of any changes.



Festival of Humanism in Bournemouth

Fifteen members of Dorset Humanists attended Humanists UK's Festival of Humanism at the Bournemouth International Centre in June. Review and photo by Aaron.

Arriving home after my first humanist conference – correction, Festival – I thought it best to write down my impressions while they were still fresh.

Without doubt, meeting other humanists was the highlight for me. With nearly 600 people attending, there was always someone new to bump into between sessions. Andrew Copson proved an excellent host, and his sense of humour certainly added to the enjoyment. Alice Roberts was the only speaker I knew in advance; everyone else was a complete unknown. They weren't the main draw for me, so I came to each talk without any preconceptions.

All the speakers delivered their talks well, and I came away having learned something from each of them. The topics ranged from newly published books and death festivals to fandom, free speech and colonialism. References to the "far right" came up repeatedly, Reform was frequently criticised, and Britain itself often seemed to be portrayed in a negative light. Overall, the tone

felt distinctly left-leaning. As a Conservative voter, I was beginning to feel about as welcome as a turd in a swimming pool before reminding myself that these were the speakers' views. Perhaps a good number of people in the audience were quietly feeling much the same as I was. I'd welcome a broader range of political perspectives.

The two interactive round-table discussions were an absolute delight to attend. After so many sessions in which speakers talked at the audience, it was refreshing to have the opportunity to interact, exchange views and explore ideas together, if not always arrive at firm conclusions. Many of the talks focused on identifying problems, whereas I'd be even more interested in hearing about possible solutions. Perhaps that's something to consider in future. We certainly weren't short of choice, with many time slots offering two or three sessions to choose from. Only one time slot failed to grab my interest, while on at least two occasions I wished I could have been in every room at once.

I found myself mentally calculating where my time would be best spent. I wanted to ►



Drinks reception and discussion facilitated by David Warden

hear about lobbying MPs, how humanist campaigns are driven, and what a humanist chaplain in the Army does, but those sessions were trumped by other topics.

I didn't attend the Gala Dinner as, at £99, it was prohibitively expensive for me. At least five people who did attend commented that the room was so loud with conversation they could barely hear one another. But that's a venue issue rather than an organisational one.

The event was well run, kept largely to time, and was well supported by the venue in terms of sound and lighting. We were fortunate with the weather too. If it were held in Bournemouth every year, I'd attend annually and recommend it to others. As it continues to rotate around the country, however, the cost of travelling and staying in hotels will have to be weighed against the distance involved.

Dorset Humanists hosted a humanist groups drinks reception at the Festival

Report by David Warden

Dorset Humanists committee agreed to fund a drinks reception for humanist groups from around the country. This was very well attended – perhaps because of the free drinks! 65 people attended, representing 28 groups.

The majority of groups described themselves as stable or expanding, including several new or developing groups. Growing or thriving

groups mentioned a wide variety of activities including talks, discussion events, cafés, social meetings, walks, book groups, film events, schools work, science meetings and community activities.

The feedback suggests that local humanism remains active and resilient, with groups experimenting with different ways of bringing humanists together.

The main challenge was renewal — both in terms of attracting younger and more diverse participants and in encouraging existing members to become active volunteers and organisers.

This appears to be a common challenge across local groups, including successful ones. The issue is not simply attracting people to events, but developing the next generation of organisers and contributors.

Many groups felt they could improve communication with local humanists and potential humanists. There is clearly a large population of people who broadly share humanist values but who may not know that local humanist groups exist or understand what they offer.

The overall message was encouraging: local humanist groups face common challenges, but there is a great deal of creativity, experience and enthusiasm across the movement.

More festival photos by Aaron:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/rChrR8aqyV9oQUe36>



Who speaks for gay people today?

And who appointed them?

In this thoughtful and very personal essay, Aaron reflects on his journey from feeling proudly represented by the rainbow flag to wondering whether today's LGBT movement still speaks for him. For many years, Aaron led Dorset Humanists' representation at Bournemouth's annual LGBT pride event. This article was produced by Aaron with editorial assistance from "Elian" (ChatGPT).

I miss feeling represented

I've been a gay man all my adult life. That sounds like an odd sentence to write, because being gay has never been the defining feature of who I am. It's simply one characteristic among many. I enjoy running, photography, science fiction, writing, politics, long walks along the coast, chatting with friends over lunch and, somewhere in the middle of all that, I happen to be attracted to men. For most of my life, that's all I ever wanted society to understand.

Like many gay people of my generation, I grew up in a world where acceptance wasn't guaranteed. The battles that mattered were simple ones. We wanted to be able to live openly without fear. We wanted to love the person we loved without being treated as

second-class citizens. We wanted equal opportunities at work, equal respect under the law and, eventually, equal recognition of our relationships. Those weren't demands for special treatment. They were requests for equal treatment.

Over time, society moved. Attitudes softened. Laws changed. Same-sex relationships became something that, for millions of people, simply weren't remarkable anymore. That wasn't just a victory for gay people. It was a victory for everyone who believed that people should be judged by their character rather than by who they fell in love with.

For a while, I genuinely felt represented by the rainbow flag. To me, it symbolised something beautifully simple: we're people too. Nothing more, nothing less. ►

But somewhere along the journey, I began to feel that the public image of the LGBT movement was changing, and I wasn't changing with it. That's an uncomfortable thing to admit. Not because I've stopped being gay. Not because I've suddenly become opposed to equality. Neither of those things is true. It's because I increasingly find myself looking at the public face of a movement that once felt like home and thinking: "I'm not sure that speaks for me anymore."

And judging by conversations I've had over the last few years, I'm far from the only one quietly thinking that.

When the journey changed direction

I don't think the movement changed overnight. It happened gradually. Looking back, I can even see moments where I welcomed some of the changes.

When I was working for a local authority, there was an LGBT staff support group. Alongside similar networks for disabled staff and ethnic minority staff, it was intended to provide support and improve understanding in the workplace. I attended a number of meetings, partly out of curiosity and partly because I wanted to contribute.

At the time, I remember thinking how remarkable it was that an employer was openly recognising gay employees instead of pretending we didn't exist. That represented real progress.

Yet I also remember a small voice in the back of my mind asking whether we were beginning to move beyond equality. Our network received funding and paid time to meet. None of this seemed outrageous, and I'm not suggesting there was anything sinister about it, but it was perhaps the first time I paused and wondered where the line between equality and preferential treatment might eventually be drawn.

At the time, it seemed like a trivial thought. Years later, I wonder whether it was the first hint that the conversation was beginning to change.

The same was true of Pride. The first Pride events I attended felt joyful. They celebrated something that, only a generation earlier, would have been difficult to imagine: thousands of people openly celebrating the fact that being gay no longer had to be hidden.

As a humanist volunteer, I attended because I believed visibility mattered. Even after legal equality had largely been achieved in Britain, I still felt there was value in showing solidarity. Around the world, millions of LGBT people continued to face imprisonment, violence and discrimination simply for being themselves. Pride still had an important message to send beyond our own borders.

But gradually, I began to notice something changing. The conversation seemed to move away from sexual orientation and towards something much broader. The familiar rainbow was joined by new flags. The acronym grew longer. New identities, new terminology and new ideas about sex and gender became increasingly central to the public face of the movement.

None of this happened because somebody announced a new direction. It simply evolved. Yet, as it evolved, I found myself recognising less and less of the movement that I had originally supported.

The questions being asked no longer seemed to revolve around whether gay people deserved equal treatment. In many respects, society had already answered that question. Instead, public debate increasingly centred on gender identity, pronouns, language, definitions of sex, sporting categories, changing social norms and a growing collection of identities that many people, including many gay people, struggled to understand.

Whether those developments are positive or negative is almost beside the point. The point is that they are different. And somewhere along the way, many of us quietly stopped recognising ourselves in the public image of the movement that claimed to speak on our behalf. ►

Who represents us?

Every community develops symbols. For decades, the rainbow flag became ours. It represented something wonderfully ordinary: that gay people wanted to live ordinary lives.

When most people thought about gay rights, they thought about couples holding hands, building careers, buying homes, getting married and growing old together. The message was never, "Look how different we are." It was, "Look how similar we are."

Perhaps that was why public attitudes changed so dramatically. People stopped seeing "the gays" as an abstract political group and instead saw neighbours, work colleagues, sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. That was an extraordinary achievement.

Yet today, I wonder whether the public image has drifted away from the people it claims to represent. If a television company wants footage for a report about Pride, they know exactly where to point the camera. Not at the quietly dressed couple who have been together for twenty years. Not at the accountant who happens to be gay. Not at the nurse. Not at the engineer. Not at the bloke in the Tesco queue who simply happens to be attracted to other men. The cameras naturally gravitate towards spectacle. Towards elaborate costumes. Towards drag performers. Towards dramatic makeup. Towards colourful hair. Towards people whose appearance immediately captures attention.

I understand why. Television has always preferred pictures that people will remember. The difficulty is that, over time, the spectacle begins to replace the ordinary in the public imagination. Eventually, the performance becomes the identity.

If someone with no personal experience of gay people were asked to picture "the LGBT community", I sometimes wonder what image would immediately come into their mind. Would they picture millions of ordinary people quietly getting on with their lives? Or would they picture the most colourful five minutes of a Pride parade?

Those are not the same thing. And yet one increasingly seems to stand in for the other.

I don't resent the people who enjoy dressing up. Nor do I believe anyone should be prevented from expressing themselves however they choose. What troubles me is something much simpler. When the loudest voices become the only voices, the quieter majority gradually disappears from view. The ordinary gay man – the one who simply wants to find someone to love, build a life together and be left in peace – becomes almost invisible. Ironically, the very people whose acceptance the movement originally sought can begin to feel that nobody is speaking for them anymore. Not because they have changed. But because the spotlight has moved elsewhere.

Waiting on the platform

Perhaps this is simply what happens to every movement. It begins with a clear purpose. It succeeds. Then, having achieved many of its original goals, it begins looking for new ones. History is full of examples. Campaigns rarely declare, "Our work here is done." Instead, they evolve. Sometimes that evolution is necessary. Sometimes it isn't. Perhaps that is what I have been watching over the past decade. Not the end of the gay rights movement, but its transformation into something broader, more complex and, for me at least, less recognisable.

I don't write this because I want to go backwards. I have no desire to revisit a Britain where gay people were ashamed to hold hands in public or where coming out risked losing your job, your home or your family. Those victories mattered. They still matter.

Nor do I believe everyone in the modern LGBT movement thinks the same way. There are thoughtful people with whom I disagree, just as there are thoughtful people with whom I agree. This isn't really about individuals. It's about belonging.

Today, I sometimes feel like a guest in a community that once felt like home. ►

I haven't become less gay. I haven't changed my values. I still believe every person deserves dignity, freedom and equal treatment under the law. What has changed is the feeling that those simple beliefs are no longer the movement's defining message.

Increasingly, I find myself wondering whether there are many others quietly standing where I am. Not campaigning against anyone. Not wanting to take rights away. Not wishing to stop anyone living as they choose. Simply looking at the public face of the movement and thinking: "Is this really speaking for me?"

Perhaps the train in my mind's eye is travelling exactly where millions of people want it to go. If so, I wish them well. But perhaps there are also thousands of ordinary gay men and women still standing on the platform. Teachers. Engineers. Nurses. Shop workers. Parents. Students. Retired couples. People whose lives are, in truth, wonderfully unremarkable. People who never wanted to become symbols of anything. People who simply wanted the freedom to love who they love and then get on with living their lives.

If that is where you find yourself, then perhaps you will recognise the picture that began this essay. Not because it shows anger. Not because it shows rejection. But because it captures something quieter than that. It captures the feeling of watching a train leave the station and wondering, almost with surprise, "When did that stop being my train?"

A response by David Warden

You're not the only one Aaron. I too feel alienated by the new flag and aspects of the LGBTQIA+ movement. I was chairman of the Dorset County Council LGBT staff support group around 2008. By 2018, the longer acronym had established itself and the American designer Daniel Quasar introduced the new progress flag to go with it.

The old movement simply campaigned for lesbian, gay and bisexual rights (LGB). It was about sexual orientation. I didn't mind adding the T because trans people were always part



The traditional rainbow flag and the newer progress pride flag

of the gay scene and being gay has always been partly about gender non-conformity.

But what has happened is that, over the last decade or so, the gay rights movement has been absorbed into the broader social justice and identity politics movement. This views society as an arena governed by oppressor majorities and oppressed minorities. It is motivated by perceptions of injustice and the desire to achieve equity between identity groups.

I have some sympathy for this way of viewing things. As gay men, we were both "oppressed" by heteronormative assumptions that pertained in society as we were growing up. Thankfully, a lot of that has changed.

But as humanists we should take care not to become too attached to grand theories about society, and the social justice and identity politics movement is just that – a grand theory. It may help to explain some injustices. But if it's the only explanatory hypothesis in someone's toolkit then it can become divisive and dogmatic.

There's still value in showing solidarity with gay people around the world. I'm still in touch with a group of LGBT refugees in Sudan who are waiting patiently to be relocated to Canada. The process can take years. And all because of the atrocious anti-gay laws in Uganda and elsewhere.

Maybe in ten years' time the movement will have evolved again. Meanwhile, I'm grateful to live in a country where past struggles have led to greater freedoms today.



A point of view

David Warden

Today's technology allows us to live increasingly self-contained lives. We can spend our evenings streaming films, listening to podcasts, browsing social media or travelling to concerts, festivals and exhibitions. The modern world offers extraordinary opportunities to learn, be entertained and enrich our lives.

But while consuming content and experiences is an important part of making the most of the one life we have, it's usually not enough on its own. Why? Because consuming is essentially transactional. A consumer chooses what they want, pays for it and moves on. It creates pleasure in the human brain. It may be done in the company of others, such as attending a concert or a football match with thousands of others. Such experiences can be ecstatic, but they can be fleeting.

As social animals, we also seek belonging and meaning, as well as pleasure. We may belong to an extended family or a club or a political party or a community. Belonging asks something of us in terms of the contribution we make, and this is what distinguishes it from consuming.

Humanist groups sit somewhere between these two models. Most humanist groups put on a programme of events and hope that people will show up to enjoy the talk or the walk or the social event. Our humanist groups reception at the Festival of Humanism indicated that most groups, operating on this basis, are reasonably stable or expanding while some are declining.

I believe, however, that humanist groups need to adapt to a changing world. In the last ten years especially, consumer choice has exploded and people can now, for example, access an infinite number of excellent talks on YouTube from the comfort of their own living room. Humanist groups which continue to host talks in the old way may find it increasingly difficult to maintain audiences.

But making the transition to a community model also presents challenges. Communities require people to show up, not just to consume an event, but to connect with people. Communities don't just happen by chance. The conditions for them to flourish depend on people who are willing to contribute their time, talents and energy for the benefit of everyone else. Every successful club, charity or voluntary organisation depends on those who attend when they can, quietly organise events, make tea, welcome newcomers, serve on committees and do countless other jobs that are rarely noticed. Without such contributions, communities can weaken and even go extinct. This has happened to countless humanist groups over the past hundred years.

Communities are not always easy. People have different personalities, different political opinions and different ways of seeing the world. A healthy community asks us to practise curiosity, tolerance and forgiveness.

Dorset Humanists, celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, has already travelled a considerable way along the road from being just an events programme to a genuine community of purpose, growth and belonging. Every contribution, however large or small, helps to keep that momentum going and secure our continued existence well into the future.